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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 September 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 272

SUBJECT: Status of the Tunisian Problem

1. Progress toward settlement of the Tunisian issue is at a standstill awaiting the October session of the UN General Assembly. Although the French and certain Tunisian notables made some attempts to reach a prior rapprochement, nationalist intransigence and Schuman's inability to win sufficient concessions from the French Assembly have precluded any further negotiation. No solution of the Tunisian issue is likely to result from UN consideration, but this very fact may impel the nationalists toward a later bilateral settlement.

2. Recent Developments. Concurrently with Arab-Asian bloc efforts to gain a GA hearing for the Tunisian case, the French attempted to win acceptance of their present reform program and thus forestall UN discussion. The program was submitted to Premier Baccouche early in July, minor changes were suggested and speedily adopted, and the French handed the modified version to the Bey on 1 August. Resentful of French pressure and under nationalist domination, the Bey was ill-disposed toward the reform program but reluctant to accept sole responsibility for its rejection. He therefore adopted the adroit nationalist plan of submitting the reforms to an unofficial advisory group of 40 prominent Tunisians. With perhaps deceptive unanimity, this group made a wholly negative report to the Bey. He then dispatched a note to President Auriol which in effect rejected the proposed French reforms.

3. Current Nationalist Position. The Bey's rejection of the French reform program was due largely to the influence of labor

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union leader Farhat Hached, who has increasingly controlled the nationalist movement in Tunisia. Moreover, the fact that no counter-proposals were offered probably was due to his influence. Hached probably feared that counter-proposals would lead to Franco-Tunisian negotiations and thereby forestall active UN consideration. He has staked much of his prestige on bringing the Tunisian case to the UN, and is presumably relying on UN discussion to close the Tunisian ranks behind his leadership.

4. There is apparently little nationalist disagreement on the immediate goal of internal autonomy, but there are indications of growing nationalist disunity over the methods of its attainment. Hached must deal with the jealousy of his associates and the underlying opposition of moderates in Tunisia, as well as the divergent moves of the prominent nationalist exiles now in Cairo. In influential nationalist quarters there also appears to be less faith in the ability of the UN to take useful action. The Bey's eldest son, Chedly, may have sponsored a recent approach toward obtaining US arbitration between the French and Tunisians prior to the UNGA session.

5. The French Position. The French have repeatedly emphasized that they will not grant further substantive concessions to the Tunisian nationalists. However, they have taken steps to present their position in a more favorable light to international opinion. They have released the majority of their political detainees in Tunisia, and Pinay invited Baccouche to Paris for consultation. Experts are now preparing a rebuttal to the anticipated Tunisian nationalist report to the UN. The French also are taking precautions against an expected outbreak of violence in Tunisia early next month, which may be staged by the nationalists to prove the Tunisian case a threat to world peace and to gain sympathy from UN members.

6. Probable Events in the UN. The French probably will reluctantly agree to discussion of the Tunisian case in the GA. Nevertheless, they will debate UN competence to take any action regarding Tunisia, such as calling for an investigating commission. If the debate goes against them, the French, though not withdrawing from the UN, probably will abstain from further discussion and ignore any concrete UN proposal. However, there is little likelihood that the UN Tunisian debate will lead to such a proposal. While the Latin American countries probably will vote en bloc for discussion of the problem, only a minority would be apt to support

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realistic UN action. It is unlikely that the Arab-Asian Bloc can obtain sufficient votes to enforce its views without full support from those countries. Any UN action thus will probably be confined to a resolution in favor of renewed Franco-Tunisian negotiations.

7. UN failure to take firm action on Tunisia will cause widespread resentment in the Arab countries and South Asia, but might nevertheless promote progress toward a bilateral settlement. Deprived of expected UN or US support and incapable of mounting a successful revolt, the nationalists may face the realities of the situation. Extremist influence probably would be sufficiently weakened to allow the Bey (or his son) to rally moderate elements to accept the substance of the French reform program. The French cabinet might then authorize a few further concessions to make the program more palatable. Such a settlement, however, could only be of a temporary nature; the fundamental differences between the French and nationalists would remain unreconciled.

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- 3 -

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